

Book Reviews

The Books of Assumption of the Thirds of Benefices: Scottish Ecclesiastical Rentals at the Reformation. Ed. James Kirk. Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1995. 987 pages with a map. £50. ISBN 0 19 726125 6

This immense work is a welcome companion to *Accounts of the Collectors of Thirds of Benefices 1561-1572*, edited by Dr Kirk's mentor and friend, the late Professor Gordon Donaldson who, prior to his death, read the whole text of the volume under review, and to whom the book is dedicated.

The manuscript sources used are carefully noted and the editorial method described (pages lxxxiv-lxxxvi). The translating of the manuscripts' Latin entries not only produces uniformity but is helpful to many who nowadays find it difficult to work in that language.

The Introduction, some eighty-seven pages, which could have been a book in itself, is an excellent survey of the institution, organisation and development of the financial framework of the thirds of benefices. While the reasons for not including an index to the Introduction accord with many valid precedents, many will have regrets in view of its scholarly significance. On the other hand, however, the provision of a Glossary, at the end of the text, will be most welcome to a large number of scholars unfamiliar with Scots.

The detailed inventory of what could be ascertained at the Reformation regarding the Roman Church's wealth, its listing of the teinds of the produce of the land, etc., as described in sections 8 to 10 of the Introduction, will be of interest to economic and agricultural historians, while the family relationships and the involvement of the large number of lairds, as well as of the nobility, revealed in the lay and clerical possession of church benefices, provide useful insights for the social historian. For the ecclesiastical historian, although the material has been used, to varying extents, by several scholars, most recently e.g. by Charles H. Haws in *Scottish Parish Clergy at the Reformation 1540-1574* (additions to which can now be made from the volume

under review), there is a great deal which will encourage future scholars to quarry in this work for national, parochial or biographical information.

The index in such a large volume is of great importance and yet a balance had to be struck between its extent and detailed descriptions in the entries. The decision to index personal names as they appear in the manuscripts has ensured that the volume has been published more timeously than would otherwise have been the case if biographical details had been introduced into the large corpus of information already there. Thus the reader will often have to make the decision as to whether or not a certain benefice holder is a pluralist or whether there is more than one cleric of the same name. On the other hand, those who use the volume will have no difficulty in identifying for themselves such men as John Craig as a minister of Edinburgh, Thomas Lindsay, Snowdon Herald, as collector of the thirds of benefices, Lothian and Merse, Clement Little as advocate of the kirk and commissary of Edinburgh, etc. In such a lengthy undertaking, it is inevitable that there are one or two slips to be found. However, the users of the index will be grateful for the immense amount of work put into the supplying of map references for all the place-names.

Dr James Kirk is probably the only scholar who is equipped, willing and devoted enough to have undertaken this Herculean task with such meticulous care. Present and future generations will be grateful to him for having made it possible for Scottish historians, wherever they live or work, to have immediate access to this great bulk of information which is useful in so many ways.

Oxford University Press and Mr James Rivington, the British Academy's Publication Officer, must be congratulated for the production of such a fine volume, while individual scholars, who yield to the temptation of having a copy on their own shelves, are grateful to those who ensured that the cost of such a prestigious publication has been held down at £50.

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